He Felt Crunch For His Phone Pheats

By TIM REITERMAN

Not many people go to prison for pursuing a hobby, but a passion for playing with exotic telephone equipment has finally put Captain Crunch in the slammer.

"It's a hobby, like CB radio — it's diddling around," the electronics whiz kid says. "Why do I do what I do? To hear a call go through, to hear all that telephone company equipment work for you, that's what you're after. Chirps, bells and tinkles."

Crunch, whose given name is John T. Draper, reflected without regret about his hobby just before driving south from San Francisco to the federal prison at Lompoc. He started serving a four-month sentence Oct. 4 for defrauding Pacific Telephone Co. of $30 worth of long-distance calls.

Draper, 32, has been a legendary member of the mischievous "phone phreaks," whose shenanigans and illegal long-distance calls have made them natural enemies of phone companies around the globe.

Phone officials hope his conviction, and 122 other toll fraud convictions last year, will deter phreaks and others from cheating the phone company out of an estimated $1 million in calls each year.

The essence of phone phreaking is the imitation of electronic sound signals which trigger phone company equipment, allowing calls to be placed and routed without charge.

For all practical purposes, the phenomenon has its roots in a cereal box. In the late 1960s, it was discovered that Captain Crunch cereal contained free plastic whistles that produced a tone of 2600 cycles per second. That frequency was a key to making a phone work for free.

Draper, with the scraggly black hair and horn-rimmed glasses of the proverbial mad scientist, learned this and other fascinating secrets after meeting a blind phreak in an accidental phone encounter.

"Then I ran into Denny, who said he had 27 ways to make free phone calls," he recalled. "Denny invited me to meet his friend Jim, who told me he would make a free call by playing certain tones on an organ into a phone.

"I told him he was crazy because I didn't think the phone company was dumb enough to have a system so easy to break into. Anyway, Jim blew my mind.

"He dialed an 800 (toll-free) number and hit a E above middle C on the organ. All of a sudden, the 800 number disappeared with a clunk. I heard a white noise, a hissing, then he used the organ to key out the number I wanted. It worked."

Draper, with electronics training in the Air Force and San Jose City College, went home and fabricated his own organ to imitate phone signals. He fashioned a "Blue Box," a device which succeeded Captain Crunch whistles as the most prized possession in "phreakdom." "That started me phone phreaking," Draper said with undisguised glee. "First, I called all my friends. Then, I thought, 'Wow! Here I am with the phone company at my fingertips. Free.' "

Crunch boasts of many elaborate phone feats unsanctioned by Ma Bell.

One call, he said, was routed around the world clockwise a few times, from San Francisco to London to Sidney to San Francisco, then around the world counterclockwise a few times.

He describes another experiment in a room with two phones, using one to call around the world to the second. "About eight seconds after I answered one phone, I listened on the second phone and heard myself answering the first phone," he said.

"It took my voice that long to travel around the world."

Associated Press

JOHN T. DRAPER
Legendary Captain Crunch

Escape Over Berlin Wall

BERLIN (AP) — Two brothers climbed over the Communist wall from East Berlin into West Berlin to seek political asylum in an increasingly rare wall escape, a West Berlin police spokesman said yesterday.

The spokesman said the brothers, 21 and 22 years old, made their escape Tuesday night in heavy fog and darkness and apparently undetected by East German border guards.

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Irish to Vote on President Nov. 24

DUBLIN, Ireland (AP) — The Irish will vote Nov. 24 for a replacement for President Cearbhall O'Dalaigh, who resigned after Defense Minister Patrick Donegan said the president was a "thundering disgrace" because of his opposition to the government's new antiterrorist laws.

The opposition party, Fianna Fail, is expected to put up Maj. Vivion De Valera, a son of former President Eamon De Valera.

Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland, a 54-year-old lieutenant in the Ulster Defense Regiment, the mostly Protestant militia, was killed by a man who walked into his hardware store in Armagh and shot him in the back.

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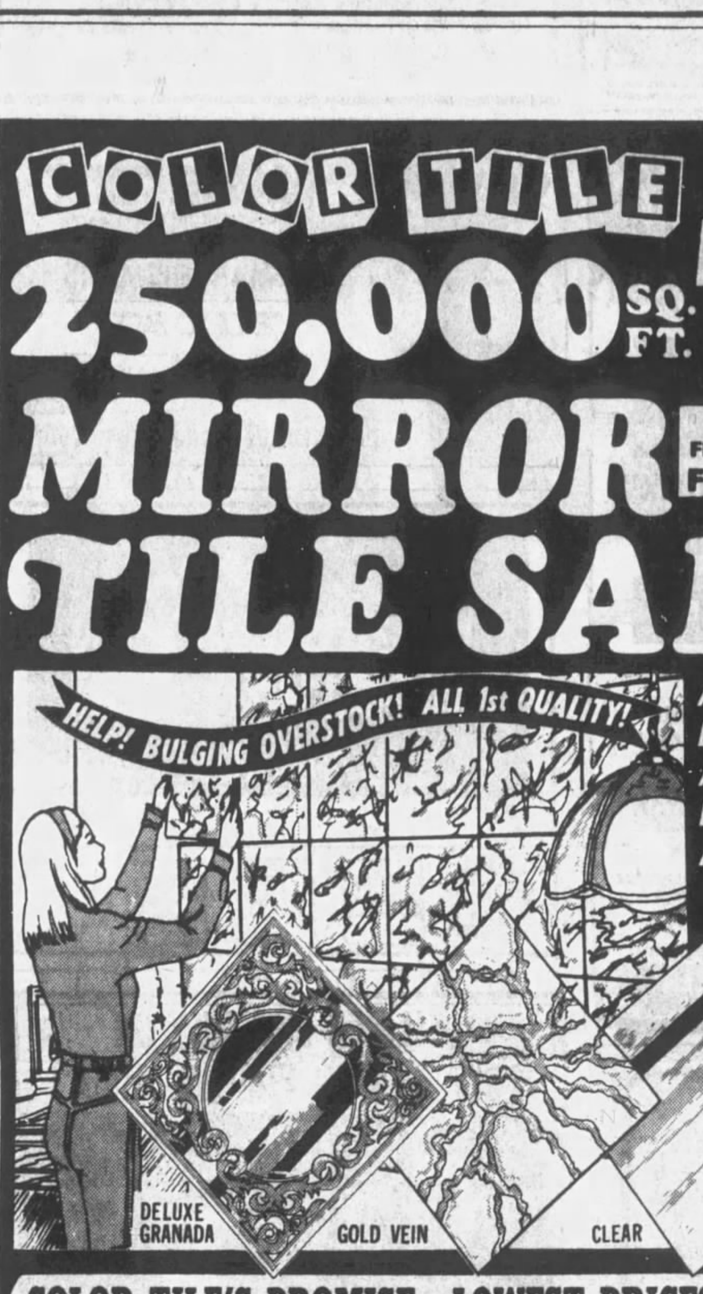

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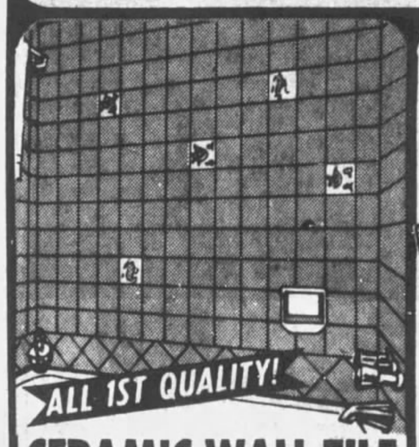

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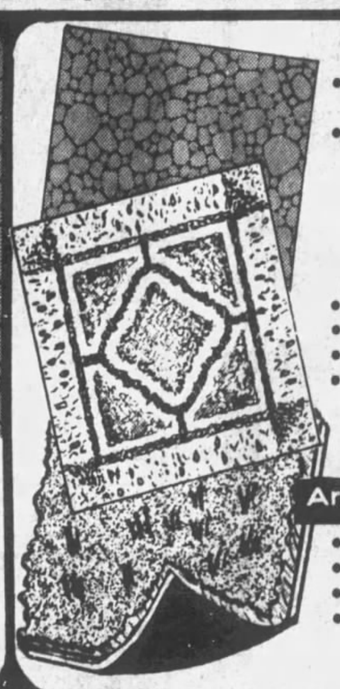

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